



# **CIVIC PARTICIPATION**

*A Curriculum for Immigrants and New Citizens*

**TEACHER HANDBOOK**



CATHOLIC LEGAL  
IMMIGRATION  
NETWORK, INC.

# CIVIC PARTICIPATION

## *A Curriculum for Immigrants and New Citizens*

### INTRODUCTION

Civic participation is an exciting characteristic of immigrant integration. Often, this topic is mentioned only briefly in citizenship preparation classes, which tend to focus exclusively on helping naturalization applicants pass the citizenship test. CLINIC offers this curriculum for teachers, community-based organizations, places of worship, libraries, ethnic-based organizations and others that wish to delve more deeply into civic participation: what it means; why it is so important for immigrant communities to have a voice on issues that impact them; and how they can get involved in concrete ways.

This curriculum is a stand-alone document with four modules that can be used all together or separately. Each module is one class session. The modules can be added to a citizenship class session or used for a separate course focusing exclusively on civic participation. The modules work best in a classroom setting, but can also be adapted and used one-on-one with a tutor or for self-study. The four modules could be spread over four weeks or offered as one, four-hour seminar. Community-based organizations, places of worship, libraries, or ethnic-based organizations may offer this curriculum as a seminar or institute on how to be an engaged citizen, concluding with a brainstorming session on action steps.

For each module, there is a teacher handbook and a student workbook with readings, discussion questions, and activities. This curriculum is based on a chapter in CLINIC's handbook, *Citizenship for Us*. CLINIC hopes this curriculum will be a useful tool for educators and others wishing to facilitate civic participation by new Americans. For additional resources on civic participation, see [CLINIC's Center for Immigrant Integration](https://cliniclegal.org/issues/immigrant-integration) (<https://cliniclegal.org/issues/immigrant-integration>).

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# CIVIC PARTICIPATION: MODULE 1

## OVERVIEW OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

### LEVEL

Intermediate

### SUGGESTED LENGTH

1 class period (60-90 minutes)

### VOCABULARY (Found in red throughout this handbook)

**Petition (v):** To make a written request to the government.

**Grievances (n):** Complaints.

**Interfere (v):** To try to stop something from happening.

**Jurisdiction (n):** The geographic area that an elected official represents.

*Have the words written on the board at the start of class session. Refer to the words when appropriate over the course of the reading and discussion.*

### OBJECTIVES

#### Students will:

- Identify three or more examples of civic participation activities.
- Describe where the right to civic participation comes from.
- Explain why it's important to participate in civic life, by giving two or more reasons.

### MATERIALS AND HANDOUTS

See Student Workbook for Module 1. Bring local news articles that discuss current civic issues.

### TEACHER PREPARATION

Review Teacher Lesson Plan and Student Workbook. Read a local newspaper or website to get an idea of some current issues affecting the community (i.e. development, environment, schools, law enforcement, etc.).

### EXERCISES (2)

Break into pairs for discussion and report back to whole class.

## EXERCISE 1

**Begin with breakout exercise. First, read or ask for a volunteer to read the following paragraph from the Student Workbook.**

### **Case Story**

There are many African taxi drivers in Washington, D.C. Some are citizens, and some are not. Together, they created a group to speak with the city council on rules affecting taxi drivers. They also discovered ways they could serve their neighbors by using the tools they have – their taxis. During elections, the taxi drivers offer free transportation to the voting polls for African immigrant seniors. One volunteer taxi driver said, “I’m not eligible to be a citizen yet so I cannot vote, but by giving people from the community free rides to make sure they were able to go and vote, I could still participate in democracy. It was simple for me. It’s all about our democratic rights.” Civic participation is easier when there is a goal to accomplish and many people to help.

**Ask students to pair up and discuss the following questions (listed in Student Workbook) for 10-15 minutes:**

1. How did the taxi drivers serve their community?
2. What did you like about their decision to drive African senior citizens to the polls?
3. Did they need to be citizens in order to help?
4. What could the African taxi drivers do to make a bigger impact in their community?

**Come back together. Ask the students to share what they discussed with the whole class.**

**Read or ask for volunteer from class to read the following paragraph from the workbook.**

### **WHAT IS CIVIC PARTICIPATION?**

Civic participation means doing something to help people in your community, as well as yourself. You can work on your own or with a group to do things that help make improvements. Usually, people do this type of work as a volunteer. This means that they are not paid to do the work. Often, the volunteers will provide food, materials or other resources that are needed for a job for free. For example, an organization might ask that people help clean up a public park and fix the broken equipment. The volunteers would bring tools, snacks and other necessary things. Civic participation is an important way for people to make a community a better place to live for everyone.

**Ask the class a few clarifying questions to check for comprehension:**

1. What does “civic participation” mean?
2. Are people paid when they volunteer?
3. What are ways people can engage in civic participation?
4. Why do people volunteer? What is the benefit?
5. How does the community benefit from civic participation?

**Ask: What are some other examples of civic participation activities?**

**Present and discuss the following examples:**

- Organizing or participating in neighborhood meetings, clean-ups or cultural festivals
- Volunteering with a community-based nonprofit organization
- Participating in the Parent-Teacher Association at your child's school
- Participating in a local religious group (church, temple, or mosque)
- Joining a civic or community group
- Raising money for a local charity
- Attending city council meetings
- Giving testimony at public hearings
- Participating in meetings to discuss community issues
- Writing to a newspaper (such as a letter to the editor)
- Writing or calling your elected officials to give them your opinion on an issue
- Taking part in rallies, marches, or vigils
- Volunteering for a political candidate's campaign
- Voting and registering others to vote
- Running for elected office

## EXERCISE 2

**Ask students to pair up and discuss the following questions for 10-15 minutes:**

1. What does civic participation mean to you? Share 1-2 experiences you had in your native country with civic participation.
2. Does anyone have experience in the United States with civic participation? If yes, where and how?
3. Do you have any neighbors, co-workers, or friends who are involved in civic participation? How are they involved?
4. What local issues do you care most about? (Or what issues concern you the most?)

**Come back together and ask the students to share what they discussed with the whole class. The teacher can add some examples of current, local issues if needed.**

**Read or ask for a volunteer to read the following paragraphs from the Student Workbook.**

### WHERE DO YOU GET THE RIGHT TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION?

Your right to participate in the civic life of the United States comes from the Constitution and the first ten amendments to the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights reads:

*"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to **petition** the government for a redress of **grievances**."*

#### What does this mean?

The First Amendment says the government cannot **interfere** with your right to practice your religion, to free speech, to a free press, to come together peaceably with others, and to petition the government to correct a wrong. This means that you can tell people who work for the government your opinions even if you disagree. You can start or join an organization that supports something you believe in, such as workers' rights. You can organize a group of people or an event in a public space.

**Ask: What document gives you the right to civic participation?**

Ask students to write their answer in the space provided in the workbook.

**Ask: Why should you participate in civic life?**

**Answers to discuss and present:**

- Because finding solutions to common concerns – from neighborhood crime to polluted water – takes everyone’s ideas and efforts.
- Because you have important ideas, experiences and skills to contribute.
- Because you are better able to represent the needs and concerns of immigrants than someone from the outside.
- Because your voice needs to be heard by decision-makers so they will make good choices for your community.
- Because you believe it is important to create a better future for the next generation.
- Because the strength of the United States depends on the civic participation of newcomers and new citizens.
- Because you will learn new skills and have fun!

Ask students to write two reasons in the space provided in the workbook.

**Read or ask for volunteer from class to read the following paragraphs from the workbook.**

**HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN CIVIC LIFE BEFORE BECOMING A U.S. CITIZEN?**

To participate in some civic activities, such as voting, you must be a citizen. But there are many ways you can participate and have a voice in the decisions that affect your daily life *before* you become a citizen. You have time, talents, money, ideas, experiences, and relationships with other people.

You might already volunteer. Do you give your time to a local group, such as a soccer league, a senior citizens association, or a business group? You can also volunteer with organizations or places that serve all Americans, such as libraries, public parks, neighborhood groups and others.

**COMMUNICATING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OTHER DECISION MAKERS**

One important way to participate is to use your First Amendment right to free speech by communicating with elected officials and other decision makers. You can do this through letters, e-mails, phone calls or in-person visits. You can do this as an individual or as a group. It may be more comfortable and less scary to speak out as a group.

Elected officials represent all the people who live within their **jurisdiction**, not just the people who voted for them. However, your message is more powerful when you can say, “This is what I think... and I vote!”

**Ask:**

1. What right do you have under the First Amendment?
2. How can you use this right?
3. Have you ever sent a letter or an email to an elected official?

Ask students to write on their Student Workbook two examples of civic participation activities that might interest them.

# CIVIC PARTICIPATION: MODULE 2

## ELECTIONS

### LEVEL

Intermediate

### SUGGESTED LENGTH

1 class period (60-90 minutes)

### VOCABULARY (Found in red throughout this handbook)

**Accountable (a):** Having to answer to or explain one's actions to a person or group of people.

**Nonpartisan (a):** Not connected to, supporting, or opposing a political party.

*Have the words written on the board at the start of class session. Refer to the words when appropriate over the course of the reading and discussion.*

### OBJECTIVES

#### Students will:

- Identify one reason why it is important to vote.
- Name one issue decided by national elected representatives and one issue decided by state and local elected officials.
- Explain the difference between a primary election and a general election.
- Identify two ways to learn about candidates and issues.

### MATERIALS AND HANDOUTS

See Student Workbook for Module 2.

### TEACHER PREPARATION

Review Teacher Lesson Plan and Student Workbook. Review these websites with nonpartisan voter information:

<https://votesmart.org/> and <http://www.vote411.org/>.

### EXERCISES (2)

- Break into pairs for discussion and report back to class.
- Break into two groups for an assignment and report findings back to class.

**Read the following paragraph from the Student Workbook, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **WHY SHOULD YOU VOTE?**

Elected officials make important decisions that affect your life and issues that are important to you. When you vote, you are telling elected representatives your preference for the kinds of decisions and policies you want to see. By voting, you can hold elected officials **accountable** to your community. This means that you are making sure your representatives do what they promised to do before the election.

Elected officials are more likely to listen to people who are registered to vote and who vote. So, when you speak publicly as a registered voter – and when you vote – your opinion is more likely to be heard!

### **Ask:**

1. What does “accountable” mean?
2. To whom are you “accountable” in your life?

**Read the following, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **WHY YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO VOTE**

All citizens over the age of 18 can vote. Four amendments to the Constitution protect the right to vote. However, in the past, state elected officials created barriers to voting for certain groups, especially African Americans. Some voters were required to pass a test to see how well the person could read and write. Some voters were charged a tax in order to be able to vote. Many citizens, especially African Americans, volunteered their time to protest this unfair treatment. They marched in protest and gathered in public spaces with many other people to demand change. Their efforts helped convince elected officials to pass a law called The Voting Rights Act of 1965. This law made it illegal to prevent people from voting. This law also requires that materials in other languages be provided at certain voting locations.

### **Ask:**

1. Why do you think it’s important to vote?
2. Did you vote in your native country?
3. Can you describe some of the rules about voting in your native country?

**On your workbook, please answer the following questions:**

1. Who has the right to vote?
2. What law requires that this group of people be able to vote?
3. What is one reason why it’s important to vote?

**Read the following, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **IN WHICH ELECTIONS SHOULD YOU VOTE?**

In the United States, there are elections for national, state and local positions. Elected officials at these levels make decisions that affect people's lives in many important ways. For this reason, *all elections* are important to a democracy.

At the national level, you can vote for the president and your members of Congress (senators and representatives). At the state and local levels, you can vote for your governor, state legislators, city and county council members, mayor and school board representatives.

National elected officials make decisions such as how much money you pay in federal taxes, how many refugees the United States will accept each year, and how clean our air and water should be.

State and local officials make many of the decisions that affect your local community, such as how much money to give your public schools, how many police officers will protect the public, and whether to build a new public library.

### **Ask students:**

**Which level of government (national, state, or local) do you think decides the following:**

1. How much you pay in local taxes
2. When and why the United States should go to war
3. What kind of public transportation will be available in your town
4. What will be the future of Social Security
5. How much public space your city has and how it can be used

## **EXERCISE 1**

**Ask students to pair up and discuss the following questions for 10-15 minutes:**

1. What other issues do you think are decided at the federal level?
2. What other issues do you think are decided at the state and local levels?
3. Which issues are the most important to you right now?

*Come back together and ask the students to share what they discussed with the whole class. The teacher can add some examples of current local issues from the lists below, if needed.*

### **National issues:**

- How much money the federal government will spend on health care and other human services
- Which relatives you can sponsor as immigrants
- How much money we provide in aid to foreign countries

### **State and local issues:**

- How much money will be spent on affordable housing and child care
- What the penalties will be for different kinds of crimes
- What will be the speed limit on your neighborhood roads or state highways

**Ask students to take a moment to write down two issues that are important to them at either the national or state and local levels.**

**Read the following, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTIONS?**

There are a few necessary steps to decide the candidates for an elected position. One of those is holding a primary election. In a primary election, voters choose a candidate to represent a political party later in the general election. This election could be for mayor, governor, senator or president. In the primary elections – also called “the primaries” – voters can only choose from a group of candidates from one political party. The two major political parties are Democratic and Republican. The rules about who can vote in the primary election are different in each state. In some states, you can only vote in the primary election if you have already joined a political party. In other states, you do not have to be a member of any political party. Instead, you can go to the poll on Election Day and decide for which political party you want to vote.

The general election is after the primary election. Anyone who is registered to vote can vote in the general election. In the general election, you may vote for any candidate from any party. However, you can only select one candidate for each political office. For example, in a general election, if there are three candidates for president on the ballot, you can only vote for one person.

**Ask students to write one way that a primary election is different from a general election in the space provided on the Student Workbook.**

### **Ask:**

1. Did you have primary and general elections in your native country?
2. How does the process in the United States differ from the process in your home country?

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Ask:**

1. How do you decide who to vote for?
2. How can you learn about the candidates and issues?

**Write students' ideas on the board for reference. Discuss each example presented.**

**Present and discuss the following examples if not mentioned in the class discussion:**

**Newspapers.** Newspapers often publish stories about candidates for upcoming elections. Newspapers may support one candidate over another.

**Candidate Materials.** The candidates' campaigns pay for written materials and advertisements on radio and television to encourage you to vote for their candidate. They may sponsor public meetings or other events for you to get to know the candidate. Candidates also typically have their own websites.

**Community and Civic Organizations.** Although many of these organizations are not allowed to support or oppose candidates for office, they can provide information about candidates' positions. Community and civic organizations often hold community meetings or candidates' forums to help inform voters about the candidates and the issues.

**Issue Advocacy or Special Interest Groups.** In the United States, many different organizations promote a specific issue or cause, such as the well-being of children or the environment. These organizations often provide information about candidates' positions on an issue.

**Internet.** Project Vote Smart has a website at <https://votesmart.org/>. You can also reach Project Vote Smart by calling 1-888-868-3762. The website has a database of information about current elected officials, as well as candidates in upcoming elections. This information includes their education, work experience, and opinions on different issues.

### **A Helpful Source of Election-Related Information**

The League of Women Voters is a nonprofit organization that provides **nonpartisan** information about the election process in each state, including information about election dates, ID requirements, polling place locations and registration deadlines. It also has a polling place locator that allows you to type in your address and find the poll location for your precinct. Its website is <http://www.vote411.org/>.

#### **Ask:**

1. What are two ways that you learn, or plan to learn, about candidates and issues in upcoming elections? Write your answers in the space provided on the Student Workbook.

## **EXERCISE 2**

**Break the class into two groups and provide them with nonpartisan links to information about two candidates running against each other in an upcoming election, using <https://votesmart.org/> or <http://www.vote411.org/>. Assign one candidate to each group and ask them to identify the candidate's positions on three of the following topics:**

- Climate change
- Education
- Immigration
- Taxes
- The economy
- Health care
- Foreign policy

**Ask each group to report their findings to the class.**

# CIVIC PARTICIPATION: MODULE 3

## PREPARING TO VOTE ON ELECTION DAY

### LEVEL

Intermediate

### SUGGESTED LENGTH

1 class period (60-90 minutes)

### VOCABULARY (Found in red throughout this handbook)

**Ballot (n):** Usually a piece of pre-printed paper that lists the candidates for different elected offices and the issues on which you can vote. You record your choices on the ballot.

**Appointed (a):** Selected by an elected official.

**Accommodation (n):** An adjustment that is made to meet special needs in order to ensure participation in an activity.

*Have the words written on the board at the start of class session. Refer to the words when appropriate over the course of the reading and discussion.*

### OBJECTIVES

#### Students will:

- Name two ways to prepare for Election Day.
- Understand the process and requirements for voter registration in their state.
- Give one example of a voting accommodation.
- Understand the difference between absentee voting and early voting.

### MATERIALS AND HANDOUTS

See Student Workbook for Module 3.

### TEACHER PREPARATION

Review Teacher Lesson Plan and Student Workbook. Have several computers available with internet access for the exercise if students cannot access the internet via cell phone. If these are not available, research and print information from your state election office website for students to use in the breakout exercise. Use this link if needed to find your office: <https://www.usa.gov/election-office>. Find out if online voter registration is available for your state by checking this link: <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx#Table%20of%20states%20w/ovr>.

### EXERCISE

Break into small groups to complete exercise and report findings back to the class.

**Ask the students to imagine that today is Election Day. What information do they need to be able to vote? Put these ideas on the board.**

**Read the following from the Student Workbook, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

### **Registering to Vote**

You must register before you can vote. In most states you must be registered 20-30 days before the next election. To register, you must fill out a voter registration form and either mail it, leave it with a state agency or public office, or deliver it in person to a voter registration office in your local, county, or state government. You can also give the form to the person who registers voters (a voter registrar). In 38 states plus the District of Columbia, you can register online.

### **Who Can Register**

You must be a U.S. citizen and at least 18 years old on or before the date of the election. You also must be a resident of the state where you will vote. Each state has its own voter registration laws which further identify who can register.

### **How Often to Register**

You do not need to register for every election. Usually you do not have to register again unless you have moved, voted for a long time or changed your name. You can call your state election office or visit its website to learn the rules for your state.

### **Voter Registration Card**

After you register to vote, you will receive a voter registration card. When you vote, you may be required to show your card and/or another form of identification.

**Ask the class some questions to check their understanding of the reading.**

1. Who can register to vote?
2. How do you register to vote?
3. What happens after you register?

**Ask if anyone is already a citizen and has already registered to vote. Ask them to describe their experience to the class.**

**Ask students to look at the sample voter registration card in the Student Workbook.**

### **Ask:**

1. What information can be found on this card?
2. What other information do you need in order to vote in an election?

Read the following from the Student Workbook, or ask a student volunteer to read it.

## WHAT HAPPENS ON ELECTION DAY?

After registering to vote, here are some things you can do to prepare for Election Day:

- **Know where you go to vote.** A polling place, also called a polling station, is where you and your neighbors go to vote. Polling places are divided by the precinct where you live. A precinct is a division of a community. Your precinct number is printed on your voter registration card. If you are still not sure where to vote, you can ask your neighbors or call your county election official, often called the county/municipal clerk or supervisor of elections.
- **Know what time the polls open and close.** Each city, county or state determines what time the polls open in the morning and close in the evening.
- **Talk to your employer.** Make sure you speak to your employer in advance if you need to take time off work to vote. Nearly all states have laws requiring employers to allow employees to take time off to vote.
- **Bring a valid ID with you.** In some states, you must present a valid identification card to vote.
- **Learn about the candidates and issues.** It is important to be an informed voter. For more information, see below.
- **Bring information you want to take into the polls.** You can bring a voter's guide with you that lists the candidates' positions on issues to help you remember your choices among candidates.

Ask students if they want to add anything to the list they generated earlier (on the board) about what information they need in order to vote. Ask them to write their answers on the Student Workbook where it says, "list information you need to know in order to vote or prepare for Election Day."



**Read the following, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **BALLOTS**

When you go to vote, you will receive a **ballot**. A ballot is a list of the candidates for each office that will be decided in the current election. The ballot will also include the issues that are also being voted on that day. All states elect certain offices such as governor, senator and attorney general. However, some positions, such as judges, are elected in some states and **appointed** in others. In order to vote, you choose the person you want to elect, sometimes by using a pencil to mark the empty box next to the person's name. In many places, you use a computer to make your selection. After you make your choices on the ballot, you then "cast" your ballot. You cast your ballot by either putting the paper ballot into a box at the polling place or by submitting your ballot via the computer.

In some elections, you might also need to vote on an issue, such as raising taxes for a new school building. These are called referendums, propositions or ballot initiatives. In these elections, you are asked to vote "yes" or "no" for the proposed tax or law. In some states, if the majority of people vote "yes," it will become law. In other states, the results of the election serve as a recommendation to the state elected officials.

**Ask students to take a look at the sample ballot in their workbook.**

1. What candidates are running for election on this ballot?
2. Who is running for Congress?
3. What are the directions for voting in this election using this ballot?

**Read the following, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **WHAT IF YOU NEED SPECIAL ASSISTANCE?**

Some voters who need help to vote may ask for an **accommodation**. Voters might need an accommodation if they have a physical or mental disability, are unable to read or write, or have limited English. An accommodation is a type of special help or assistance. If you need special assistance, you can ask when you arrive at your polling place. You can contact your state board of elections in advance if you have questions.

**Ask students if they can think of any accommodations that might be helpful.**

**Continue reading.**

**Some examples of voting accommodations are:**

1. Large print ballots;
2. Braille ballots;
3. Help in reading or marking your ballot;
4. Having the ballot brought to your car;
5. Ability to use a wheelchair while voting; and
6. Bilingual ballots (ballots printed in multiple languages) or other bilingual language assistance.

Bilingual language assistance is available where there are a lot of citizens who speak limited English. Ballots are most commonly translated into Spanish and Chinese, but Los Angeles County, for example, prints ballots in nine languages.

**Ask:**

1. Do you or someone you know need special assistance in voting?
2. What do you do if you need an accommodation when you vote?
3. Are there other types of accommodations that someone might need that are not listed?

**Ask students to answer the following questions on the Student Workbook:**

1. What are two reasons a voter can request a voting accommodation?
2. What is one example of a voting accommodation?

**Read the following, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

**WHAT IF YOU CANNOT GET TO THE POLLS ON ELECTION DAY?**

Increasingly, states allow or, as in Oregon, even require voting to be done ahead of time, by mail. In those states, ballots are sent to voters by postal mail. If your state relies primarily on voters physically going to a polling place, you still have options for how to cast your ballot.

- **Absentee Voting.** You can get an absentee ballot if you think you will be out of town from your assigned voting location on voting day. You can also get an absentee ballot if you are ill, elderly, disabled or prevented from going to the polling place due to a religious holiday. Absentee voting is done by mail. You can get an absentee ballot by calling, writing, or going to your county election official, often called the County/Municipal Clerk or Supervisor of Elections. You must apply for the ballot a certain number of days before the election, usually 30 days, and return the ballot by a deadline.
- **Early Voting.** In some places, you can vote before the election, for example if you know you will be busy or out of town on Election Day. You do not need to give an excuse to vote early.
- **Voting Outside of the United States.** When you are leaving the United States for a short period of time, you can get an absentee ballot. If you will be living outside of the United States for a longer period or will be abroad in military service, you can vote using your last address in the country. Contact a county voting office and ask for a Federal Post Card Application. You can also find this form on the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at <http://www.fvap.gov>. This is a voter registration and absentee ballot request combined. This will allow you to vote absentee for one year. Each year you must reapply.

**Reiterate key information from the reading above.**

**Ask:**

What is one difference between absentee and early voting? Ask students to write their answer on the Student Workbook.

**EXERCISE****Break the class into several small groups of 2-3 students**

Ask each group to research online the following information: What are the general rules for voter registration, absentee and early voting in my state? If computers are not available or students cannot use a cell phone, print this information from your state election office website. Find the office here: <https://www.usa.gov/election-office>. Ask the groups to share what they learned with the rest of the class and discuss it.

# CIVIC PARTICIPATION: MODULE 4

## SERVING ON A JURY, SERVING ON GOVERNMENT BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, AND RUNNING FOR OFFICE

### LEVEL

Intermediate

### SUGGESTED LENGTH

1 class period (60-90 minutes)

### VOCABULARY (Found in red throughout this handbook)

**Verdict (n):** A formal finding of fact by a jury on matters or questions submitted to the jury by a judge.

**Peers (n):** Other people like you.

**Nominate (v):** To recommend.

*Explain the vocabulary words at the start of the lesson and have them written on the board during each class session. Explain them again as they come up in the course of the reading and discussion.*

### OBJECTIVES

#### Students will:

- Describe what a jury is and what it does.
- Understand why jury duty is an important responsibility of citizenship.
- Identify the role of boards and commissions.
- Describe how people are selected for boards and commissions.
- Name one reason for running for an elected office.
- Name one immigrant in an elected office.

### MATERIALS AND HANDOUTS

See Student Workbook for Module 4.

### TEACHER PREPARATION

Review Teacher Lesson Plan and Student Workbook. Identify some local boards and commissions in your community and any local elected officials who are immigrants.

### EXERCISE

Break into groups for an assignment and report findings back to class.

**Read the following from the Student Workbook, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **WHAT IS A JURY?**

A jury is a small group of citizens who sit in the courtroom to hear statements made in a legal disagreement. The jury decides together what they think is the truth. Together, the jurors make decisions, also called **verdicts**, based on the evidence that is presented by the people on both sides of the issue. They also use the law to help them decide which side of the argument should win the case.

As a U.S. citizen, you may be called to serve as a juror, or a member of the jury. Jury duty is an important responsibility of citizenship. In the United States, a person accused of a crime generally has a right to a trial by a jury of **peers**. "Peers" means fellow citizens, and it is important for jury members to reflect the community.

**Ask the students to underline in the reading passage above what a jury is and what a jury does, then write the answers on their workbook in the space provided.**

### **Ask:**

1. Has anyone here ever served on a jury? If so, describe the experience.
2. What does it mean that a jury "should reflect the community?"
3. Why do you think it's important for a jury to reflect the community?

### **Did You Know?**

In the United States, a person accused of a crime has the right to have a lawyer during the trial. This right is found in the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution.

## **HOW JURORS ARE SELECTED**

When it is your turn to serve on a jury, you will receive an official letter in the mail called a *summons*. This letter will tell you when and where to go for jury duty. The rules about jury duty are very strict. This letter will have important information, and you must follow the directions. For example, you will have to arrive at the courthouse on time to check in. Later, you might watch a video about how the court operates and about the responsibilities of a juror. While you are at the courthouse, you may be called to a courtroom where lawyers choose a jury for a case. You might not be called to the courtroom at all if you were not chosen to serve on the jury.

If you are called to a courtroom, you will be asked a series of questions by the lawyers. The lawyers interview people until they find enough jurors who they think are both qualified and able to serve.

You may not ignore a jury summons letter. There are different penalties for not appearing for jury duty, depending on each court's rules. For example, you may have to pay a fine.

**Ask the students what a jury summons is. Ask them to write their answer on the workbook.**

### **Ask:**

1. What are the steps to serving on a jury? (List these steps on the board.)
2. What happens if you choose to ignore the jury summons letter?

Washtenaw County Trial Court  
101 E. Huron, P.O. Box 8645  
Ann Arbor, MI 48107  
[www.washtenaw.org/1400](http://www.washtenaw.org/1400)

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# JURY SUMMONS

Failure to appear can result in a fine, incarceration or both

JUROR NAME  
1234 JURY DR  
ANN ARBOR, MI 48104

7524-WMDEG



## YOU HAVE BEEN SUMMONED FOR JURY SERVICE

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 04, 2018 8:15 a.m.**

Washtenaw County Trial Court  
101 E. Huron  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104  
Jury Assembly Room on the 2nd floor

Service Number: 2577-BTAF3

Pool #: 5



**Step 1:** Respond to this notice by completing the Odyssey Jury questionnaire located on our website at [www.washtenaw.org/1400](http://www.washtenaw.org/1400) **within 10 days.**

If you do not have access to the internet, please call 734-222-3354

**Step 2:** ALL JURORS, if you do not hear from us, please check your reporting status at [www.washtenaw.org/1400](http://www.washtenaw.org/1400) or call **734-222-3354** beginning Friday AFTER 5:00 p.m. the weekend before your summons date.

Jurors who appear WITHOUT CHECKING their reporting status will NOT receive payment for attendance.

\*\*Parking instructions and other information can be found on our website\*\*

**PLEASE BRING THIS POSTCARD WHEN YOU APPEAR.**

**Ask the students what a jury summons is. Ask them to write their answer on the workbook.**

**Ask:**

1. What are the steps to serving on a jury? (List these steps on the board.)
2. What happens if you choose to ignore the jury summons letter?

## EXERCISE

**Divide the class into five groups. Assign one of the paragraphs below to each group. Ask each group to read the paragraph, discuss it, and then present the information to the class.**

### **1. What Happens When You are Chosen to Serve on a Jury?**

If you are picked to serve on a jury, you will learn a lot about how the justice system works. Once the trial begins, your responsibility will be to listen carefully to all the information about the disagreement. Then, you will come to an agreement with your fellow jurors on the verdict.

### **2. How Long is Jury Duty?**

A person who is picked to serve on a jury for a case is expected to serve until the case is completed. It may take a few days, a week or longer. In some states, you serve for one day or one complete trial. If you are not picked as a juror, you may go home, and your jury duty is over. In others, you may need to report to jury duty for a certain number of days even if you are not picked to serve as a juror.

### **3. Getting Excused From Jury Duty**

*You can be excused from jury duty for a variety of reasons, including:*

- You cannot speak or understand English;
- You cannot serve because of a physical or mental disability (you must provide a letter from your doctor); or
- You are age 70 or older and do not want to serve.
- You can also request to postpone or reschedule your jury service for personal or professional reasons. For example, if you will be traveling on the date you are asked to serve, or if your children are sick and you must stay home, you can ask to reschedule your jury service.

### **4. Payment for Jurors**

You will be paid a small amount for your time and transportation. However, you must pay for your own lunch. You should check with your employer regarding its policy on jury duty. Employers can be fined if they fire someone for taking time off for jury duty, but they are not required to pay wages while an employee is on jury duty.

### **5. Important Terms to Understand for Jury Duty**

**Plaintiff:** The person bringing the case against another person, who is called the defendant.

**Defendant:** The person who has been accused of committing a crime or civil offense.

**Punishment:** The punishment for a defendant found guilty could be jail time, or a fine. This depends on the crime.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What did you learn about jury duty?
2. Would you like to get picked for jury duty?
3. Do you have any other questions about jury duty?

### **Ask:**

Does anyone know another opportunity for civic participation available to naturalized citizens, in addition to serving on a jury?

**Read the following from the Student Workbook, or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **ROLE OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

In the United States, federal, state, and local government agencies use boards and commissions as a way to give advice to the government. Community residents serve on these boards and commissions. Boards and commissions provide an important opportunity for participation in democracy. Some examples of local boards and commissions are:

- **The Hennepin County Adult Mental Health Local Advisory Council** in Minnesota advises the county government on mental health issues within the county.
- **The Arlington Commission on Aging** in Virginia advises the county government on the needs of older residents and assists in planning aging services.
- **The Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission** in Arizona advises the county government about community concerns and needs related to public parks and recreation facilities in the county.

Boards and commissions influence decisions that affect many different aspects of individual and community life, from services for seniors to public libraries and how public land will be used. It is important that they represent different groups in the community. By serving on a board or commission, you can make sure that the needs and concerns of your community are considered when decisions are made.

Typically, a mayor, city council, or county board chooses members to serve on boards and commissions. However, in most places you can apply and **nominate** yourself. Many boards and commissions are open to noncitizens, but some may be only open to citizens.

## **IMMIGRANTS WHO SERVED ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**



Across the United States, many immigrants who hold elected office at local, state, and national levels began their careers by serving on boards and commissions. For example, Walter Tejada, former Chairman of the Arlington County Board in Virginia, is an immigrant from El Salvador who served on citizen advisory groups including the Fiscal Affairs Advisory Commission, Affordable Housing Task Force, and Neighborhood Day Organizing Committee.

### **Ask:**

1. Who can serve on government boards and commissions? (Ask students to write their answer on the workbook)
2. Do you know of any local government boards and commissions in your community? (Teacher may give some examples.)
3. Has anyone has ever served on a government board or commission in the U.S. or their native country?

## RUNNING FOR OFFICE

The ability to run for elected office is a benefit of being a U.S. citizen. Anyone living in the United States can speak their opinions to elected officials and other decision-makers. Only citizens can serve as elected officials. As an elected official, you can help make decisions, policies and laws that affect the entire community in which you live.

As a naturalized citizen, you have the right and opportunity to run for every political office except for the president of the United States. Across the country, hundreds of naturalized citizens hold elected office, including mayors, city councilmembers, state legislators and members of Congress. Here are just a few examples:



### **Ilhan Omar**

Born in Somalia, is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for Minnesota's 5th Congressional District.



### **Mohamed Khairullah**

Born in Syria, is Mayor of Prospect Park, New Jersey.



### **Adriano Espaillat**

Born in the Dominican Republic, represents New York's 13th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives.



### **Mazie Hirono**

Born in Japan, represents Hawaii in the U.S. Senate.



### **Ana Sol Gutierrez**

Born in El Salvador, is a member of the Maryland House of Delegates and represents District 18 in Montgomery County.



### **Pramila Jayapal**

Born in India, represents Washington's 7th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

### **Ask:**

1. Who can run for elected office in the United States? (Ask students to write their answer on the workbook)
2. What is the only office that requires a candidate to be born a U.S. citizen? (Ask students to write their answer on the workbook)
3. Has anyone ever run for public office in their native country or in the U.S.?
4. Are there any local elected officials in your community who are immigrants?

**Read the following or ask a student volunteer to read it.**

## **READY TO PRACTICE CITIZENSHIP?**

All of us have the right and responsibility to give our time and talents to improving our communities. In the United States, it doesn't matter where you were born, what year you came to the United States, how much money you earn, or how many years you attended school – we all have a job to do. Yes, making your voice heard can be a little scary at first. But once you get started, you'll find it's fun and you'll want to do even more.

## **CONCLUSION**

Ask students to go back to the Student Workbook for Module 1 and review the examples of civic participation activities. Ask them to reflect on the last question again: What are examples of civic participation activities that might interest you?





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